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ABSTRACT

Internationalization of higher education and of the student services areas within universities is almost certainly a subject to be dealt with now or in the near future. Career centers may be pressed to internationalize sooner than other areas because of student demand. The university career center should respond to this demand and seek to assist students in participating in the global economy. This digest briefly sketches: the development of the program; establishing the need; creating an administrative base; the primary program goals; components of the internationalized career center; possible problems; and societal benefits. (ABL)

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ERIC DIGEST

December 31, 1991 EDO-CG-91-4

Internationalizing the University Career Center

Robert Sanborn

Overview

In the emerging global era, efforts to enhance international higher education in the United States focus upon study and work abroad programs. As internationalization becomes an increasingly important trend, other international programs will arise in response to student needs. Internationalization of higher education and of the student services areas within universities is almost certainly a subject to be dealt with now, or in the near future. Career centers, as a part of student services, may be pressed to internationalize sooner than other areas because of student demand. The university career center should respond to this demand and seek to assist students in participating in the global economy.

Development of the Program

Development of the international component of the university career center follows many of the usual steps taken in the development of any university program. The added extra dimension is the integration of college career programs and international programs. While the process used for the installation of the internationalized career center will vary at each university, the *basic* steps will be the same at virtually all university career centers.

Establish a Need

The population of the university should be evaluated to determine if it will use the planned program. Preliminary information may include the increasing popularity of study abroad programs and other limited international opportunities, and the news media's continued focus on international changes. These factors may combine to create a general perception among faculty, staff, and students that a need exists for international programs.

Establish an Administrative Base

A separate office is not usually established initially for the sole purpose of international work but will likely be a part of an existing department, such as the international student services office, the study abroad office, an academic department, or the career office. An existing staff member should coordinate and implement the program as part of his/her duties. Internationalization of the career center may be coordinated as a part of the entire career services program.

Program Goals

Five primary goals are an integral part of the development of an internationalization program. These broad goals can be broken down into specific areas and further developed into components of the career center.

- *Development of a professional staff.* Students seeking counseling or attending workshops presented by the career center must have confidence in the information provided by counselors and professionals with a strong fundamental knowledge of international career prospects.
- *Education of students.* International career education should focus on discussion of international employment and graduate schools through publications, workshops and seminars, and counseling. Education should also create an interest in those students who are less knowledgeable on the subject.
- *Development of international resources.* A resource center or library with a number of international career reference materials, such as directories, international listings, general readings, and international graduate school program catalogues, must be acquired and assembled.
- *Opportunities for international experience.* Opportunities range from short-term international volunteer programs to academic credit internships with an emphasis in an international area, to longer term international projects, such as summer jobs abroad.
- *International opportunities for graduating students.* Efforts should be made to facilitate the career selection process, including identification of key employment areas, areas that have potential for American student employment, organizations aiding the international employment process for Americans, and graduate programs in international fields.

Components of the Internationalized Career Center

Career centers can offer students international options and assistance in a number of areas. Some university career centers may attempt to implement international aspects in all areas of career placement and services. Other career centers may prefer to modify the program to suit particular needs and meet limited objectives.

Career counselors must be able to confidently answer questions about international careers, summer jobs abroad, graduate and professional schools with an international emphasis and opportunities for travel abroad.

Resource or library areas need to be developed with international directories, international publications, international job listings, lists of contact names, and other books on international careers and related areas.

Information sessions, seminars, workshops, and similar methods of outreach are ideal for providing information to students. Workshops should be offered by the career center on international topics such as careers in international affairs, international engineering careers, and international summer jobs.

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Internships abroad provide students with an excellent way to gain specific career experience and skills while living in a foreign culture. Relationships should be initiated with local international organizations to increase student internship placement and employment possibilities.

The university career center should seek to create opportunities for **international experiential learning**, enabling students to view and participate in a foreign culture, and to experience life in a developing third-world country.

Publications written by the career center should focus attention upon international careers. Creation of an **international newsletter** for students provides a constant and consistent source of international career information and educates students on international career issues.

Students interested in **graduate programs in international affairs** should be encouraged to investigate professional schools of international affairs, or programs in public policy with international emphases.

The career center should design an **international summer jobs program** for students interested in working abroad during the summer. Positions must be developed for all majors.

Possible Problems

A number of problems can exist with an internationalized career program. For example, one university career center's successful program could create problem areas at other universities. These problems, while certainly manageable, are worth noting in the evaluation or planning of any internationalized career program.

The dearth of specific information can create problems for a career center. Programs may be developed from primary sources and from the personal experiences of the staff at established programs. Communication between universities with international career programs is a logical step to the advancement of knowledge within the field. Universities should have the option of building their programs on the proven successes of other universities.

At universities where new initiatives are not always looked upon fondly, the **support of the university administration** can be gained by establishing that students need and are demanding such a program. Some career centers will also have to deal with systems in which initiatives only arise from administrators, rather than at the center itself.

University career centers may not have the flexibility, time or budget to contemplate enhancement or innovation. In general, **budgetary problems are a major obstacle** for career centers and can be a large hurdle for establishing internationalization programs. Generally, the level of budgetary support received by a career center corresponds to the level of administrative support.

Student support could easily diminish for a number of reasons: (1) excitement lapses as time passes; (2) international interest among students is not as high as initially assessed; (3) students express an interest in international careers without knowing anything about the subject; (4) students mistake an international career for one that involves travel immediately upon graduation without the benefit of any special skill or foreign language ability; and, (5) students realize the difficulty of locating international possibilities.

A number of **problems may occur with faculty**: (1) apathy towards student services or programs in which they have no part; (2) perception among certain academic areas that an international program can threaten them or their programs; and, (3) possible belief among certain faculty members that international experience is not necessary.

Accumulating enough donations or corporate grants for **travel funds** to award as student grants is often a problem. First, students must be aware of any costs which may be incurred through international work or travel. Second, the career center must use every effort possible to raise funds for the creation of travel grants.

Universities located in isolated rural locales could face problems initiating portions of an international program. Rural universities facing these types of problems must focus their internship attention on summer opportunities or academic internships away from the university.

Societal Benefits

The internationalization of a university's career program will have positive effects on the students; however, the long-term and abstract benefits to the university, American society, and the common good must also be noted.

- *Internationalization of the university*. Many American universities are historically introspective and regional. International career programs may propel them towards the international arena.
- *An educated society*. International education enables Americans to view the outside world intimately and facilitates understanding of global differences.
- *Enhanced economic competitiveness*. As we enter the new era of decreasing military competition and increasing economic integration and trade, the Untied States can benefit from a population that understands cultural and international differences and similarities.
- *Global understanding*. The development of a mutual understanding between nations may lead to the potential prevention or reduction of international conflict.

Resource Documents

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